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SUBJECT: BOSNIA -- PRESIDENTS' ADVISORS PLAY SIGNIFICANT
ROLE IN SHAPING DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTION

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Classified By: Michael Murphy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Over the past year and a half, we have worked closely with the cabinets and advisors to the three members of Bosnia's Tri-Presidency: Bosniak Haris Silajdzic, Serb Nebojsa Radmanovic, and Croat Zeljko Komsic. As we reported previously, (reftel), the advisors play a significant role not only in shaping the Presidents' views on policy issues, but also in setting the tone for interactions among the Presidents themselves. By and large, relations between the cabinets are poor, and there is little coordination among them on routine administrative issues, much less on important policy matters. Internal splits in Silajdzic's and Radmanovic's cabinets have exacerbated an already dysfunctional policy-making process in the Presidency. Relations between the three Presidents are also strained by the preoccupation in Komsic's cabinet with building Komsic's political standing within Bosnia and his Social Democratic Party (SDP), which often diverts Komsic's and his staff's attention from official business. END SUMMARY

DESPITE RECENT MODERATION, SILAJDZIC STAFF REMAIN DIVISIVE

2. (C) Silajdzic assumed the Chairmanship of the Presidency in March. His tenure has not been marked by the rhetorical excess and ideologically-driven obstructionism that many observers anticipated from him. This has changed over the last week when Radovan Karadzic's arrest prompted Silajdzic to launch into a series of nationalist diatribes similar to those he made after the February 2007 International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict. Several factors may explain Silajdzic's relative quiescence prior to Karadzic's arrest, including his extensive international travel schedule as Chairman; the period of political calm associated with the SAA endgame in late spring; and, Silajdzic's avowed strategy of waiting until there is a new U.S. administration before aggressively pressing his agenda. However, Silajdzic's tactical shift may also owe something to the emergence of his Chief of Staff, Nura Pino-Zimic, as the most powerful figure in his cabinet. Pino-Zimic, formerly a senior procurement official in the Federation government, is less ideological than her Bosniak Diaspora colleagues Legal Advisor Damir Arnaut and Foreign Policy Advisor Sejfuhdin Hodzic. This does not mean Pino-Zimic is any less committed to Silajdzic's "vision" than Arnaut or Hodzic, but she is less emotional than they are. As a consequence, she is less prone to advise Silajdzic to pursue "lesser issues" that have so often captured the imagination of her colleagues (e.g.

objections to the BiH Agreement with the Serb Orthodox Church that Arnaut vigorously pressed).

13. (C) Pino-Zimic's emergence has caused tension within the cabinet. Arnaut, who has often used his influence to reinforce Silajdzic's worst instincts, has seen his influence diminish in recent months. Several months ago Arnaut told us that he had decided to leave the cabinet, and not long afterwards, he launched a public bid for a seat on the Bosnian Constitutional Court, an effort that ultimately proved unsuccessful. Arnaut recently told us that he planned to stay in the cabinet for the time being, but admitted he has been increasingly absent from the office, spending time with his newborn child and wife, fellow Silajdzic Advisor Sanja Bagaric. For his part, Hodzic has also told us that he has considered leaving the cabinet and resuming the banking career he left in London. Hodzic, more polished yet no less ideological than Arnaut, has long chafed under Silajdzic's management style. He has regularly raised with his difficulty dealing with the President's frequent mood swings. Hodzic has also told us that he and his wife, a doctor by training, would like to relocate somewhere where they could "earn real money."

14. (C) Arnaut and Hodzic remain divisive figures within the Presidency. Komsic's and Radmanovic's staffs strongly dislike both of them, and often use their presence as an excuse to not engage with Silajdzic's cabinet. Radmanovic's staff believe Arnaut in particular to be an anti-Serb zealot, and point to his role in crafting Silajdzic's response to the ICJ verdict as evidence, arguing Arnaut provided Silajdzic with a

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sloppy, if not deliberately misleading, assessment of the verdict and its implications. The other two cabinets have also complained that Hodzic seeks to use international forums and discussions with foreign dignitaries to present a one-sided (i.e., Bosniak-centric) view of Bosnia. On several occasions during a recent US Embassy supported NATO tour to Brussels and Vilnius, Hodzic subjected his foreign interlocutors to lengthy political monologues arguing the need for a centralized state government structure. One such monologue drew a heated rebuke from Radmanovic Advisor Danilo Petrovic.

INTERNAL SPLIT IN RADMANOVIC CABINET

15. (C) President Radmanovic's staff remain the most professional and diligent in the Presidency. We continue to find his advisors effective interlocutors on issues of bilateral concern, who thoroughly prepare for meetings and follow-up on our conversations when it is required. Their professionalism and poise contrast starkly with most of the staff surrounding Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, who often take unnecessarily provocative positions on issues and prefer an aggressive approach to discussions. Despite their polished approach, Radmanovic's advisors will reflexively repeat unconstructive positions enunciated by Dodik and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) when the RS or to the Serb position in Bosnia are challenged. For example, Radmanovic Chief of Staff Miroslav Vujicic recently told a visiting delegation from Washington that he would not support Euro-Atlantic integration processes if they "altered the RS territorially, politically or economically in any way."

16. (C) Since the October 2007 political crisis, a split in Radmanovic's cabinet has developed that has undermined its effectiveness and complicated our interactions with his advisors. The cabinet now appears divided between staff with a strong personal loyalty to Radmanovic and those whose primary allegiance is to SNSD. Radmanovic's Foreign Policy Advisor and son-in-law, the 28-year-old Danilo Petrovic, has become the President's closest advisor. Petrovic, who deals with both macro policy issues and mundane scheduling concerns, has

become a valuable Embassy contact, and has practical and pragmatic views on most issues. Vujicic, newly hired Legal Advisor Boris Buha, and Foreign Policy Advisor Nina Sajic represent the SNSD wing of Radmanovic's cabinet. Vujicic served as the SNSD chairman for East Sarajevo, while Sajic, a former low-ranking Ministry of Foreign Affairs employee, is the daughter of a prominent Banja Luka businessman and SNSD contributor. Straddling the two groups is Security Advisor Dzuro Beronja, a former Army of Republika Srpska Colonel and intelligence officer, who, while always aware of the official SNSD position on a given issue, has developed a close personal relationship with Petrovic and is often in his company.

17. (C) Relations between the two intra-office factions have greatly soured in recent months, and relations between Petrovic and Sajic are particularly bad. Petrovic has complained to us about Sajic's "meddling," and recently, while Sajic was abroad on official travel, had her desk and work items moved from the office they shared in the Presidency building. Petrovic and Beronja are now rarely in Radmanovic's Sarajevo office, which has become the domain of Vujicic and Buha, preferring to work out of either Radmanovic's Banja Luka office or their hotel in East Sarajevo. Sajic, who told us recently that she hopes to receive an Ambassadorial appointment from Radmanovic, now spends most of her time on international travel on behalf of the President. Despite the fact that Sajic serves as Radmanovic's Foreign Policy Advisor, Petrovic is insistent that all official communication between the Embassy and Radmanovic's office go through him and bypass Sajic and Vujicic. He also claims that this is Radmanovic's preference as well.

THE KOMSIC AND IBROVIC SHOW

18. (C) President Komsic's cabinet remains dominated by his Chief of Staff and childhood friend, Amir Ibrovic. Ibrovic

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also owns the popular Tito Bar, a Yugoslav-themed establishment that recently moved to larger premises in the State History Museum. Ibrovic is a colorful character, prone to alcohol-infused monologues about public policy, Bosnia's future, and Komsic's popularity. Ibrovic has actively sought to build a good working relationship with the Embassy, and at times he has been a valuable channel to Komsic. Ibrovic has also sought, on several occasions, to use his Embassy contacts for unorthodox "requests," such as his request that the U.S. provide him with military green paint for Tito Bar (a request we ignored). Several months ago, Komsic delivered an ultimatum to Ibrovic that he either had to behave in a more professional manner or leave his post as Chief of Staff. Ibrovic took the President's warning seriously, and his conduct in the office has improved. Nonetheless, his abrasive style continues to inhibit the development of good working relationships with the other cabinets. Advisors in both Silajdzic's and Radmanovic's cabinets, and the senior staff of the Presidency Secretariat, complain frequently about Ibrovic's disruptive behavior at meetings. For example, the Presidency General Secretary told us that Ibrovic has delayed a joint decision on the official gift of the Presidency to foreign dignitaries by insisting, over the objections of his colleagues in the other cabinets, that it be ceremonial pistols.

19. (C) Ibrovic has worked, with significant success, to craft the Komsic's image as a pro-Bosnia populist in tune with the needs and concerns of average people. (Note: Recent polling confirms that Komsic is Bosnia's most popular politician, though most of his support comes from Bosniaks. Croats, whom Komsic nominally represents, remain unhappy with him. End Note) Under Ibrovic's direction, the cabinet has become primarily focused on organizing and advancing activities that fit with this broader narrative, often to the detriment of

conducting official business. In the winter, Komsic started his own web blog, which was regularly updated with commentary on political and social issues. The blog, which Ibrovic and other Komsic staffers have confessed to us is written by Ibrovic and not Komsic, quickly became one of the most popular websites in Bosnia. At Ibrovic's urging, Komsic has used his public appearances to highlight several key themes: Komsic is a strong leader focused on the average citizen's concerns; Komsic pursues "justice" for all victims of the war; and, Komsic defends the territorial integrity and state of Bosnia. Komsic's long-term political aspirations are unclear, but his popularity, if he maintains it, will provide him with opportunities beyond his current role as President. Komsic and Ibrovic have told us that the President is considering the timing of a possible challenge to Zlatko Lagumdzija for leadership of the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

110. (C) Aside from Ibrovic, Komsic maintains a small inner-circle of advisors in his cabinet. Zeljko Knez, a Croat who commanded units of the Bosniak-dominated Army of BiH during the war, has become an advisor without portfolio and travels with Komsic on most international trips. Knez, who colleagues affectionately refer to as "Commander" or "General," is often adrift on policy issues but seems to have developed a close personal bond with Komsic. Sarajevo University Professor Boris Tihi is intended to provide Komsic with policy gravitas, though his outside employment makes it difficult for him to play an active role in the cabinet. Komsic's Foreign Policy Advisor, Nerkez Arifhodzic, previously served as Bosnian Ambassador to Turkey and as the Head of Protocol in the MFA. Despite his extensive diplomatic experience, Arifhodzic has become a lightning rod for the other cabinets who have shared numerous stories with us about his dismissive, arrogant, and, at times, aggressive behavior. Arifhodzic also seems to have drawn the ire of his own colleagues -- Ibrovic routinely refers to him as an "idiot" and told us that Komsic hired him "just because he needed someone to go to receptions." Komsic's other two advisors, Legal Advisor Dijana Tabori and Media Advisor Irena Kljajic, are both young and, by Tabori's own admission, play minimal roles in the cabinet.

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